

ends unanswered

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Summary

Regulus cannot seem to shake the feeling of unease.

Severus has never missed a single opportunity to gain a few extra galleons. Skipping on a scheduled lesson that had been planned is *more* than odd – it's a reason to believe something is terribly wrong.

In which Severus is displeased to find himself in the past rather than the afterlife. He decides to do something to rectify this. Regulus is Not Okay with this course of action.

backpacks's whumptober 2023

No. 4: "You in there?"

second chance(s) scorned

Severus Snape gets a second chance. He's not really interested in taking it.

Notes

TW: Suicide (it's not graphic, but do be warned- Snape spirals A LOT, so if that's not something you're comfortable reading, skip this fic!)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Severus Severus had known that he would not live past this war.

He had responded to Voldemort's summons amidst the battle that Hogwarts was embroiled in knowing that it would likely be his last. He made excuses and deflections to offer the Potter boy more time. He struggled against Nagini with the thought of: *not yet, not yet, **not yet***.

Severus had a message to pass on. He could not die.

Not yet.

Then, Harry Potter arrived.

("So, the boy must die?")

Severus poured his memories, fervently, desperately; he was unable to be precise, but it did not matter anymore.

("You must be the one to tell him, Severus.")

Severus only needed to ensure *That Memory* was included among them.

"Take..." he gasped, begging, "Take them."

Potter took them. That was enough.

He had the antidote for Nagini's venom since Albus had set him to creating one for Arthur Weasley, yet had chosen to leave it behind before he had been Summoned. He had insisted Fawkes not come after him, there were worthier people to save. He had given Harry Potter the information needed to end the war.

He was *done*.

Warm hands pressed to this throat.

He was *finally* finished.

Voices turning indistinct.

Thank Merlin.

"Look...at...me," he whispered, and Potter obliged him.

Bright green eyes met his own; a reflection of the guilt he carried, a reminder of what he had been fighting for, and for a delirious moment, before his vision faded into darkness, he could almost imagine that those eyes might have forgiven him.

Severus Snape opened his eyes.

That wasn't right – *waking up* had not been part of the plan.

It took a moment to register his surroundings: dark green curtains, plain comforters, the room illuminated in low-light. He blinked several times, waiting for the hallucination to fade.

It did not.

Severus stood, leaving the dormitories behind. He had no interest in remaining in this nightmare, but it refused to end.

Out of the Slytherin Common Room in a much younger body, walking the halls filled with faces that had been dead for years; why did his mind insist on tormenting him in these ways?

“Oi! Snivellus!”

Sirius Black. Severus tensed. It was a reflex borne after so many years of the same pattern – *Taunt. Hex. Retaliate.* – one that he had been unable to shake, even all these years later.

Nightmares never truly end.

He doesn't see the curse coming, but he doesn't need to. He knows it is; that spells will, inevitably, come flying in his direction. He remembered from Fifth Year: there was no reason for them beyond the fact that *he existed*.

It hits him in the back and sends him flying into the wall.

Laughter. Potter and Black – he was never able to get their voices out of his mind.

His head spins, but it *does not end*.

He does not draw his wand.

He does not reply.

Instead, Severus stares right at them – James Potter and Sirius Black and Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew – and tries to figure out where it had all spiraled so much. Laughter fades at his lack of response, but when he tries to stand, he is hexed again.

Pain is a solid, grounding force.

Still, Severus should not be taking as much comfort from it as he is.

“Why so silent, Sniv? Kneazle got your tongue?”

“Piss off, Sirius!” Regulus Black comes storming into the scene. Wands divert to a new target, but after a short verbal scuffle, Sirius Black is pulling Potter away.

Regulus offers a glance at Severus, but doesn't offer help. Severus doesn't expect any, pushing himself up on his own. He looks at Regulus, youthful and unaware of the years to come, and Severus realizes—

—*he cannot face Regulus.*

His fate had been unknown to Severus until much, much later; Severus had been given information from Phineas Nigellus Black's portrait throughout Potter and his group's hunt for horcruxes. Dumbledore retrieving a locket and a note, given to Harry Potter before Severus had killed him, signed: *R.A.B.* Regulus had deserved far better than that.

No, Severus realizes, it is more than just Regulus.

He cannot face Rosier. His information had gotten Evan Rosier killed before he had even seen the upper side of twenty-one. Severus could not claim that they were *friends*, but they had maintained an acquaintance of sorts once they had both joined the Dark Lord's ranks; and Severus was responsible for his death.

He cannot face Muciber. He had cut all contact with Bruce Mulciber after the end of the First War had seen them through. He had gotten off with claiming the Imperius while Severus had been vouched for by Albus Dumbledore as a spy. Years of familiarity had never built trust between them and Severus was content to leave it that way.

He cannot face Avery. Severus might have considered Edmund Avery an ally at one point, but Harry Potter supposedly defeating the Dark Lord had fractured them all. Avery had levied more than a few accusations of *traitors* and *treachery* throughout the Old Crowd, and Severus had pointedly let him take punishment for Every Single Mistake he had made upon Voldemort's return in response.

Guilt. Wariness. Mistrust.

His mind had always liked to torment him, it seemed.

Severus was not eager to face the spectres of his past; they were best left where Severus had hidden them, far in the back of his mind, where they would not breach the impenetrable walls of his Occlumency shields, where he could be safe from his vulnerability by *not thinking about it*.

"Severus?" Regulus is looking at him, really *looking* at him, and Severus has been standing silent, unmoving, for far too long. He needs to *do* something.

Severus swallows hard, forcing the words out: "Thank you."

Severus rushes away.

Don't follow me. Don't follow me.

Regulus does not follow him.

Severus has no interest in remaining in the memories of the worst years of his childhood, and spends the next several days surreptitiously finding rest away from the dormitories, taking meals directly from the kitchen rather than the Great Hall, refusing to attend any classes.

During that time, he doesn't see his dormmates for more than a glance.

Regulus keeps casting worried looks wherever they happen upon each other, but Severus does not allow him to come near enough to question him. Severus doesn't know if he could handle that.

He bumps into Lily, once.

Severus tells her desperately, earnestly, without prompting: "I'm sorry."

He doesn't wait for her response.

Those blasted Marauders find him more than once, and he now knows that they can find him *anywhere* thanks to that Map of theirs. It had driven him mad back in his school days, how he could stick to hidden corridors and private classrooms, yet they would always, *always* find him. He had been unable to escape them, and it had driven him into helplessness.

Now, it only solidifies his sense of resignation; *the nightmare does not end*.

Severus does not bother fighting back, and they attempt to provoke a response out of him by hitting harder. The war was meant to be *over*. He was *done*.

And yet, *the nightmare does not end*.

Why was peace *still* so far from reach?

Severus had *died*.

Was that not enough?

Severus could not die twice, could he?

Suddenly, the solution is so very clear in his eyes.

(He had only cast the Killing Curse once before, on Albus Dumbledore.)

(He had meant it, then.)

Was this a dream? Was this reality? Does it truly matter either way?

(That's all it takes, really; *meaning it*.)

Either way, the nightmare *would* end.

Severus would see to it.

Regulus cannot seem to shake the feeling of unease.

Severus was avoiding him – avoiding *everyone*, really – and Regulus could not pin down why that bothered him so much. Several days of asking others in Severus’s year and trying to talk to him in person, Regulus decides to chase him down.

He sees Severus duck into a corridor that Regulus hadn’t noticed before. Has that doorway always been there? Regulus follows him, but the hallway is empty when he gets there. It’s just doors all the way down.

Regulus starts from the left, checking the door closest to him. He does the same on the right. He keeps going, methodically peeking into each empty room until he finds one that is locked. If he peers in through the tinted window, he can make out a smudge of black that might be Severus’s hair.

“Snape – hello?” Regulus raps his knuckles against the door. “Severus?”

Silence. Something like worry curls in his stomach.

“You in there?”

It’s a bad habit of his – clipping his sentences when he’s nervous, thankfully Mother isn’t here to hear it – but he can’t help it. Rosier and Avery claim he hasn’t attended classes for *days*, Regulus hasn’t seen him at meals either, and now, Severus has missed their tutoring session.

It’s *concerning*.

As much as Regulus *tries* not to judge Severus for his lack of wealth, it doesn’t take a Legilimens to recognize that Severus *desperately* needs the money, and he has never missed a single opportunity to gain a few extra galleons. Skipping on a scheduled lesson that had been planned is *more* than odd – it’s a reason to believe something is terribly wrong.

“*Alohomora*,” he casts, and pushes the door open once the lock clicks.

There, on the opposite wall, Severus is laying down, eyes open, wand hanging from gripless fingers, and body so very still.

Immediately, Regulus is struck with dread, because he realizes; no, he *knows*—

(Regulus runs over. Desperate. Frantic. Shaking.)

(Regulus crouches down. Checks for a pulse. Doesn’t find one.)

—*that it’s already too late.*

The dread seeps into his lungs, suffocating.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Severus’s chest does not rise.

Regulus can't seem to get enough air.

He stands. Stumbles back. Turns. *Runs*.

Regulus needs – he needs – *Madam Pomfrey*.

Yes. She could fix this: nearly two decades at Hogwarts, and there wasn't an injury she couldn't heal. Even then, there was always St Mungo's.

Regulus heads for the Hospital Wing. Gets disoriented; *breathe*.

He runs directly into a Gryffindor girl. He registers red hair and recognizes *Lily Evans* – they've met once, when she walked in on Severus tutoring Regulus in the library, but they've never had a full conversation.

"I – I need—" Regulus tries to force words with some semblance of coherence, but he can't *think* over his pounding heart and the desperate, illogical *hope* that somehow, this can be fixed. "Severus—"

"Severus?" Evans echoes.

"You're friends with him. He's – he needs help. He's not,"—oh, Merlin, Regulus can't *do this* —"Pomfrey. Quickly. He needs *help*."

And Regulus pushes her aside.

He knows she is still following him, a step behind and trying to get answers that Regulus does not know how to give. He makes it to the Hospital Wing, words spilling out, but not in any order Pomfrey can understand, it seems, because no comprehension crosses her face.

Surely, if she knew, she would be treating this more seriously?

Somehow, Regulus manages to lead her – them – back to the room where he had found Severus; the moment Pomfrey sees him, she is on him in an instant. Casting – Regulus doesn't even know. Diagnostics? Healing Spells?

Pomfrey is saying something. Her mouth is moving but Regulus's mind refuses to process her words. Evans screams.

And Regulus still can't *breathe*.

Hours pass in a haze.

Severus is carefully, discreetly brought to the Hospital Wing. (Like he is something shameful to hide. Regulus shared a look with Evans at the behavior, but neither of them are in any state to argue.)

Dumbledore is brought in.

Everything begins to unravel from there.

Severus's body is examined, as is his wand.

He was dead for less than an hour before Pomfrey was brought.

(If Regulus has been faster—could he have made a difference?)

(If Regulus had followed up sooner—maybe none of this would have happened at all.)

His last spell was the Killing Curse.

(And the unanswered question—why?)

Evans is sat beside him. She keeps glancing in his direction, as if unsure, as if expecting something, anything—but Regulus does nothing to break the silence.

Neither does she.

So, here they sit; refusing to acknowledge each other, refusing to acknowledge what has *happened*—

But his thoughts are racing, unbidden.

You need to mean it, Regulus knows. *You need to **want** the target to die for the Killing Curse to **work**.*

And Severus's target had been—

His body was still, no rise-and-fall of breaths or unconscious twitches; eyes fixed and blank, unseeing. Regulus didn't need to check to know that Severus was dead.

—Regulus swallowed hard.

Oh, he realizes. *Severus killed himself.*

(Dumbledore announces it as a 'tragic accident' the following morning. Whispers begin, and Lily Evans is alternating between trying not to cry and glaring at James Potter and Sirius Black. Regulus gets the sinking feeling that she and him are the only ones who actually *care*.)

It was hardly an accident. Dumbledore knows this, Regulus is sure.

But it doesn't make *sense*.

Why would Severus—?

No, Regulus knew why.

Because there were signs.

Signs that Regulus should have paid more attention to, signs that had gone ignored because ‘Snape is just like that. No need to concern yourself with what the mudblood does in his spare time.’

Regulus could even pinpoint the catalyst – several days ago – Severus had gone silent, turning inward at each attack, then disappeared altogether. It was nothing like the strong-willed, quick to attack person that Regulus had observed; it was unlike Severus to fold so easily.

He was so resilient; Regulus never thought he would...*well*.

Regulus has an answer now, bitter as it is, shouldn't that count for something?

Answers were supposed to bring closure.

It's not comforting.

End Notes

Regulus doesn't really come to the correct conclusion, but that's the point - he *can't* get an answer. He can only speculate and assume. AKA Regulus is straight up Not Having A Good Time. (Lily isn't either, but Regulus doesn't pay her much attention here.)

UP NEXT: beyond repair (Lily&Severus)

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